Overview

Living in Communities includes three activities:

Activity 1: *What Is "Community?"*
Activity 2: *Community Changes, Community Choices*
Activity 3: *Survey Your Community*

Participants will review examples of Pennsylvania communities and highlight positive characteristics inherent in quality neighborhoods such as safety, recreation, green spaces, places to visit, things to do, good neighbors and positive places for working, living and recreating. Participants will become members of communities faced with the challenges of a changing community and must determine creative ways to face the changes to maintain the quality of life they envisioned for their hypothetical community.

Participants will analyze their own community, using tools such as questionnaires, completing worksheets and comparing visual preferences.

Activity 1:
What Is "Community?"

Summary: Participants will discuss a "sense of place"...what makes a community feel like "home." They will review their own communities and describe what they like and what they would change about their community. They will discuss their opinions about suburban growth and sprawl. It is recommended that students view the DVD "Community Choices," produced by the Conservation Fund and narrated by Ed McMahon.

Questions: What are characteristics of a healthy community? What do you like about your own community and what would you change? Why is it important to develop a "sense of place?"

Activity 1

Preparation

• Cut out pictures of different communities from a magazine.

• Provide flipcharts and pens for four groups.

• Provide chalk board or one central flip chart for recording responses.

• Prepare Like/Don't Like photo activity sheets (pp 101-103).

Procedure

1. Define the word "community." A definition of community is "a group of living things sharing a common geographic space and having connections to each other." Natural communities are as diverse as the plants and animals that reside there. From pond communities to streams, from wetland communities to forest communities, animals and plants live together in these communities and have a common connection through food chains, sharing space, communication or other relationships.

Human communities are varied based on place, history, culture, the natural environment, architecture and people. Communities throughout Pennsylvania, the country and the world are diverse and continue to change, but there are common threads that have been identified as components of a healthy community. We will review some of the factors that could be incorporated into a community vision.

2. Have participants sketch a rendition of their community. (Don't provide guidance but allow each person to depict their perspective of "community.")

Highlight features of their community. Share with others what features you like about your community and what you would like to change about your community. Write the responses on a flip chart with headings

"What I Like About My Community" and "What I'd Like to Change in My Community." What is a memorable place or feature in your community? What was part of your community years ago that is not there now? What has changed in your community over the years? Option: Have participants draw a postcard that relates to their community and send it to another participant.

3. Look at sets of Like/Don't Like photos of different parts of communities. Distribute the Like/Don't Like worksheet and have participants describe how they felt about the pictures of different aspects of communities. Have participants describe why they felt the way they did.

People living in the community have the power to make choices about the type of community they want. People need the skills and knowledge to know how to implement the choices important to them.

In Pennsylvania, communities are classified into different government types based on size, population density and location from urban centers.

4. When you read or discuss land use, much is said about suburbs and sprawl. Write the words on the board or flip chart: "City," "Suburb," and "Sprawl." Visualization: Have participants visualize each and write down what participants visualize when you say the word. What do you see when I ask you to visualize a city?, suburb?, sprawl?

Cities and boroughs are referred to as urban centers. They have the following characteristics:

- Higher population density than the surrounding area
- Offer mixed use buildings such as businesses and homes on the same block or in walking distance of each other
- Pedestrian-friendly
- Served by public facilities, services and spaces such as public transportation or community centers

- Consist of many types of housing for different incomes
- Provide employment, education, worship and recreation opportunities in proximity to residential areas

Suburbs are characterized by the following:

- Located away from city centers
- Have a lower population density than traditional cities and towns
- Houses are generally larger and spread farther apart
- Create a dependence on cars for almost everything
- Separate uses into distinct areas so places for shopping, worship or movie theaters are not in walking distances

5. Discuss Sprawl. Sprawl is a term that refers to a regional pattern of development that began to impact communities after World War II. It refers to a random growth of housing developments, unattractive strip malls, business parks and roads. You could visualize sprawl as continuous suburbs and repetitive one-story commercial buildings surrounded by acres of parking lots located near highways lined with billboards and traffic lights.

Sprawl is often spoken of as an "impersonal process." It actually has its roots in the fact that people are choosing to move away from towns and choosing to take up more space in a suburban lifestyle and sacrificing community character, pride and sense of community. Sprawl is a costly choice and impacts natural resources and community quality. There are ways a community can grow economically and sustainably while controlling the negative aspects of sprawl.

The choices of how growth and development are to occur are largely the decision of each municipality. It is important for each person to understand the diversity of choices, the impacts of those choices and the reasons people are making those choices. It is also important to understand the tools and strategies available to help deter the negative problems.

Activity 1

Living In Communities

6. Planting trees in a deserted urban lot is just one way to make a difference. There are many planning choices that could improve existing urban areas and protect green space in suburban areas so that growing areas could provide more livable and environmentally compatible conditions.

Assessment and Review

There are advantages and disadvantages for living in different communities. Different choices might be better for certain life styles. Certain choices are better for protecting natural resources.

1. What choices do people have?

2. Why do certain people make certain choices?

Extension

In this lesson, the focus is on analyzing the value of livable towns, cities and similar communities. How can we improve the status of town living and create an awareness about their livability thus making it a more appealing and desirable choice for some? What characteristics make such places as Portland, Oregon and Wyomissing, Pennsylvania desirable places to live? How can we improve existing communities so that we can reduce the impacts of sprawl on our countryside?

Optional: Show Ed McMahon's DVD: "Community Choices." Discuss its message.

Activity 2:
Community Changes, Community Choices

Summary: Participants will define elements of a community and create a list of positive attributes that correlate

with attributes described by the American Planning Association. They will "develop" a community with all the elements needed for living. They will determine how to make their community desirable for themselves and their family. They will promote their community to others. Communities will face changes that will be addressed through the creativity and leadership of the citizens.

Questions: What attributes constitute a quality place to live? What is meant by a "sense of place" and how is it developed? What actions are important to help communities face changes?

Preparation

• Prepare Community Descriptions (p 104) and Nametags (pp 105-108).

• Provide four work areas with poster board and pens.

• Prepare a Community Postcard (pp 109-112) for each group.

• Develop four name place cards, each with the description of a community. Place the community name and description in each area.

1. Skyline City (urban community) with public transportation, sidewalks, walkability to shops, neighborhood schools, historic architecture, housing for all income levels, police service, public transportation, retail and specialty shops, and restaurants.

2. Forest Lake Borough with locally owned bait shop, gun shop, potter, citizens, small general store and a local diner that specializes in the "famous elk burger." Independent folks who look out for each other from a distance. Not too many outsiders visit the area. No motels. Beautiful wilderness. Easy access to countryside, adjacent to a state park with lake.

Activity 2